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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: NEW NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISOR ON THE
DELTA

Classified by Ambassador John Campbell for reasons 1.5 (b)
and (d).

¶1. (U) Summary: On August 17, 2006, Gen. Abdullahi Mukhtar, Ret., the incoming National Security Advisor (NSA), outlined to ambassadors and charges President Obasanjo's strategy for restoring order in the Delta and addressing the long-term social and economic dysfunctionality. Despite press reports to the contrary, he confirmed that the Federal government would continue to avoid force. See Comment in para. 6 below. End summary.

¶2. (U) On August 17, the NSA spent some ninety minutes with the COMs or charges of Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Poland, the UK and the US. The missions represent many of the nations whose citizens had been kidnapped in the Niger Delta over the past few days. Absent were the Irish, Ukrainian, Filipino and Norwegian missions, the result of summer leaves and other scheduling issues. The meeting was held at the request of the COMs led by the U.S. and UK in the immediate aftermath of the August 13 wave of kidnappings. The NSA, saying that he was speaking on behalf of President Obasanjo, expressed gratitude that the COMs had met with him rather than complaining to the press, which, he said, would have generated publicity that could have only encouraged the hostage takers. He went on to say that the Delta is now of central concern to the President, who had chaired meetings over the past three days to chart a way forward with all aspects of the military and security apparatus, with the oil companies and with the state governors.

¶3. (U) The NSA said that the President and the Federal government had concluded that there was a genuine basis to the grievances of the people of the Niger Delta. Their plight reflected a degraded environment, too few jobs, neglect by the Federal and state governments, inconsistent and contradictory policies by the oil companies in competition with each other with the goal of only short-term profitability, sensational reporting by the domestic and international press that imputed too much importance to the hostage takers and too little to the development efforts by the Federal and state governments, and depredations associated with oil bunkering and the illegal arms trade. The NSA argued that hostage taking was "solely" in the hands of criminals who were exploiting the legitimate grievances of the local people. He divided the Delta population into three parts: those who were "peaceful," those who could be persuaded to embrace violence, and the criminals. The Obasanjo government's

focus on economic development is designed to enlarge and strengthen the first group, while its enhanced security efforts would be directed at the latter two, he said.

14. (U) To address legitimate grievances, the NSA continued, the Federal government would pursue an economic development strategy of "Marshall Plan" intensity. It would require the oil companies to all participate in a coordinated and coherent development strategy to be coordinated by the Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation; in the area of development, the oil companies would lose their individual autonomy. The President would hold the state governors to a much higher standard of accountability than in the past. The NSA was scathing about the performance of the state governors, observing that they received enormous sums of money from the Federation account, but there was little or no trace of the development they were supposed to provide. The NSA also promised better and deeper dialogue with the community leaders in the Delta, including the militia leaders. He said that even the militia leaders would be invited to Abuja for talks "or, if they won't come, we will go into the creeks to meet them."

15. (U) On the security side, the NSA promised that the military and the security services would be "much more proactive," but he disavowed violence: "It would only exacerbate the symptoms and fail to address the causes," he said. However, there would no longer be tolerance for hostage taking, the paying of ransom by any entity (oil companies, state governments, or even the Federal government). There would be "twenty-four hour patrols on the creeks." He appealed for international assistance in curbing the flow of illegal weapons. When the U.S. ambassador recalled a stonewalled German/Canadian/American

effort to do just that, the NSA invoked the shortcomings of "bureaucracy," and he said he would personally ensure that it did not happen again. The COMs asked the NSA what was being done in the short-term to free the hostages. He replied that already some fifteen individuals have been arrested and brought to Abuja for arraignment. He asked for diplomatic patience while the government addresses a criminal situation. Though he put little emphasis on it, he did raise the possibility of a Delta state of emergency if the Delta deteriorates.

16. (C) COMMENT: The Delta landscape is littered with the wasted paper upon which numerous "comprehensive" plans have previously be written. It remains to be seen whether the current effort will be any more successful; giving the NNPC a lead role is likely to overstretch its capacity. Given the failure of past attempts, initial reaction in the Delta may well be skeptical. The President will need to move quickly to establish the credibility of the current one as his April initiative, launched after the February kidnappings, is already devoid of steam and focus. Nevertheless, the Obasanjo government appears more attentive to the Delta than it has been in the past. The NSA, at least, is deeply embarrassed by the latest wave of hostage taking. Still, the NSA showed little willingness to accept the Federal government's responsibility for delta neglect, and too much willingness to blame the oil companies and the international press. More positive, here and there in the NSA's presentation was a greater acknowledgement that Delta unrest reflects more than "criminal" activity, and that this unrest could threaten the Federation's stability. Following newspaper headlines that Obasanjo was prepared to "fight force with force" or that the security services "would hunt down the hostage takers in the creeks," the NSA was at pains to reassert the Federal government's policy of avoiding violence. For the moment, there may be political will in Abuja to address Delta ills. The enhanced dialogue with Delta community leaders would also be a highly positive development - if the communities' true leaders are in fact the government's interlocutors. (By and large, they have

not been in the past.) It remains to be seen whether the specifics outlined by the NSA are actually implemented - and, if so, whether Delta denizens are willing to meet the Obasanjo government half-way.

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